

Christmas in the Closet by unlockedlips

Category: IT (Movies - Muschietti)

Genre: Christmas Fluff, Eventual Smut, First Kiss, Fluff, Hallmark Christmas AU, Implied/Referenced Alcohol Abuse/Alcoholism, Implied/Referenced Homophobia, Internalized Homophobia, M/M, Mutual Pining, Slow Burn

Language: English

Characters: Beverly Marsh, Eddie Kaspbrak, Mike Hanlon, Richie Tozier, Stanley Uris

Relationships: Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2019-12-09

Updated: 2019-12-09

Packaged: 2019-12-16 17:06:46

Rating: Mature

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 3

Words: 6,350

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

When Richie's career is in danger of falling apart, his manager sets him up with an all inclusive vacation to give him the spark of inspiration he so desperately needs, and what better way to do that then by getting drunk on the beach? What Richie isn't expecting is to step off the plane and into a winter wonderland.

Forced to spend the next two weeks in a Christmas themed town with nothing to keep him company except his anxious thoughts, Richie finds solace in a local bakery owned by Eddie Kaspbrak, a handsome man with a sharp tongue. Maybe it's his chocolate croissants that keep bringing Richie back for more or maybe it's Eddie's uncanny ability to make him feel alive again. Whatever it is, it'll take a Christmas miracle to get Richie to admit to himself that maybe there are better places to spend Christmas than in the closet.

1. Chapter 1

“Explain to me what I’m looking at here.”

Richie squints against the bright light of Stan’s office, tries to focus on the myriad of papers scattered across his desk despite the pounding in his head, but it’s hard to look at anything when the sunshine is pouring through the floor to ceiling windows. Not for the first time, he questions Stan’s love for natural light and wonders why he can’t sit in a dim office like the rest of corporate America.

“Uh,” Richie groans and leans forward. The whole room spins and he grabs the first piece of paper he can snag from his desk. “Oh, this?” he asks, and holds up the incriminating photo of him sneaking out of a liquor store at one in the morning in a pair of mismatched flip-flops and board shorts. His hair is a greasy mess and his glasses are askew. Definitely not one of his finer moments. “I was running an errand. You know, figured the pap might leave me alone if I went shopping at night. Twenty-four hour grocery stores are a fucking blessing.”

Stan fixes Richie with a Look, capital L because only he can master the expression of looking both thoroughly disappointed and impressed simultaneously, like he can’t believe Richie would blatantly lie to him and yet he’s almost proud that he’s still trying after all these years.

“Right. Groceries. Let me guess, you’re holding a bag full of kale and protein shakes. Definitely not a paper bag full of bourbon. Fine, let’s say I believe you.” Stan stands from his desk, and it’s hard to look at him in his tailored suit, all sharp lines and soft grays. Richie will never understand how he managed to get such a clean-cut manager when he’s barely a functional man, and yet they compliment each other in ways that none of Richie’s previous managers ever could.

“Then tell me what you’re doing here, Richie. I don’t want to get the wrong idea, but it looks like you’re chugging said bottle of bourbon on the stoop of your apartment building. Alone. At four in the morning.”

Richie averts his eyes from the trainwreck of a photo to look down at

his sandaled feet only to see the left shoe is a vibrant orange and the right one is navy. Fuck. "Uh, well, this is, uh, my creative process, and who are you to judge me, the artist? I'm supposed to be gearing up for the Netflix special, and I gotta say Staniel, you're really suffocating me here. I mean, have you ever watched the sun rise while drunk off your ass? It's inspiring."

"How the hell is a sunrise supposed to be funny? You're a comedian, not a poet." Stan places the photo down, neatly on top of the rest of the stack before he picks up another paper, this one bigger than the rest. He tosses it at Richie who scrambles to catch it. God. His head really is killing him. Maybe he should have had some water before Stan called this meeting. Better yet, maybe he should have polished off that bottle. "And you're not going to be a comedian for much longer unless you cut the shit."

Richie scoffs, rolls his eyes dramatically, ignoring the sharp edge to Stan's voice. Stan's always saying shit like that to scare him, and usually it works. He'll get his shit together momentarily before going totally off the rails again. It's a cycle. It's what keeps them going. It's what guarantees a job for Stanley. Honestly, he should be thanking Richie for all of the bad publicity. Job insurance and all that.

"Chillax, man, I'm sure it's nothing. Look! It says--Wait a second, what?" He glances at the clipping of the interview Stan's given him and reads the glossy headline of the article: Trashmouth Tozier Caught Tanked At Local Liquor Store. Could He Be Mourning Low Ratings? Dread curls low in his stomach and bile climbs up his throat. He swallows loudly and wipes his mouth with the back of his hand. "Low ratings! That's - That's bullshit! I was- Come on, I was hot last year! I was smoking! I fucking hosted SNL. Everyone loves me!"

"Wrong," Stan interrupts coolly and settles back down in his leather office chair, completely nonplussed. He folds his hands together on top of the desk, looking at Richie with calm eyes which can only mean one thing--bad news. "You were hot last year, that's true. There wasn't a single household across the country that didn't know your name or your punchlines, but now? You're nothing. They're tired of the same recycled jokes, Richie. How many dick jokes can you make? They want something new. Something fresh, and instead of giving the people what they want, you're getting shitfaced on the street. I say

this because I love you but frankly, it's embarrassing."

Richie slumps down in his chair and crumples the magazine clipping before tossing it. The ball bounces off the rim of the silver wastebasket by Stan's desk and rolls towards his feet. Angrily and maybe a little petulantly, he kicks it away.

He doesn't want to be in this office being scolded by his manager like a fucking child. He doesn't want to be faced with the truth that his career is slipping away from him. He's not as young as he used to be, and humor's changed. His audience doesn't want crude, sophomoric jokes. They want something more, something real and honest, but Richie's never been good at honesty. Lies always fall so easily from his mouth that it's hard to imagine what the truth might taste like.

"Stop getting your panties in a wad. You're being such a tight-ass. What, is Patty not putting out? You know, I keep meaning to text her. They've got a special on strap-ons at that pop-up sex shop a few blocks from here. The Glory Hole or whatever, you know the one. She should get one, show you a good time, get you to loosen up." Richie's deflecting and Stan doesn't entertain it for a second.

"For one thing, the crushing weight of the impending demise of your career does not give you the right to bring my sex life into this. Do it again and I'll sever our contract without hesitation on the account of you being a huge asshole." Stan sighs heavily and pinches the narrow bridge of his nose. "And two, I'm not being a tight-ass. I'm worried about you. I might be your manager, but I've always been your friend first. Which is why I'm telling you that I think you need a break. From the limelight. From LA. From everything."

Richie rolls his eyes, scoffs because that's the last thing he needs. "I don't need a break," he pushes. "I need to get my shit together and finish writing."

"Yes, you do, and I think some new scenery might be the inspiration you're looking for. I booked you a two week vacation. Take it or leave it, I don't care, but something needs to change, Richie. This is your last shot." Stan pulls open a drawer to his desk and slides a crisp, white envelope over to Richie. He doesn't have to open it to know that there are two tickets folded neatly inside along with an

itinerary. It's not the first vacation Stan's booked for him, but it is the first under such pressing circumstances.

Richie eyes the tickets warily, feeling every bit a failure because he knows Stan's right. Out of all of his fuck-ups, this has been the worst yet. Maybe he does need a break. Some fresh air and ocean waves, one of those fruity drinks with a tiny umbrella and a shit ton of rum. With a resigned sigh, he reaches for the envelope and tucks the tickets into the pocket of his hoodie.

"Alright, Stan the Man, when do I leave?"

2. Chapter 2

After a six hour flight filled with cheap liquor and at least three unsuccessful attempts to try to lure the flight attendant into allowing him to go into the cockpit, Richie lands and knows there's been some kind of mixup when the door opens and a gust of frigid air hits him square in the face.

"Woah, I know it's hot or whatever down here but is it really necessary to set the air conditioning to Arctic Blast? Call me old but I would *not* want to see that energy bill." Which is obviously a joke but much to his chagrin instead of laughing the flight attendant fixes him with a confused look and ushers for him to get his carry on luggage.

Maybe he really has lost his touch.

As he grabs his duffel bag from the compartment above his head, families dressed in thick sweaters and pillowed coats file out of the door, talking animatedly among themselves. He catches snippets of the conversations, words like Santa and elves and hot chocolate jumping out as they exit the plane. A little strange for a trip to the tropics, but he's seen weirder. Living in LA means not much surprises him anymore, and besides, it is December afterall. So what if people have the holidays on the brain in the middle of their tropical getaway?

"Who's gonna tell them they're a little overdressed? I mean, it's gotta be at least eighty degrees outside right now. Is this some kind of new diet one of the Kardashians started? Ten bucks says they're trying to sweat out toxins or fat or whatever." This time the flight attendant turns slowly to look at him with something akin to concern in her eyes and it does nothing to settle his nerves. He feels like there's something he's not getting, like when he hears a joke and the punchline goes right over his head.

"Um, Mr. Tozier, sorry if I'm being rude, but you do know where you're at right?"

"Not rude but that's definitely a weird question to ask someone on a plane," Richie laughs and it comes out sounding strangled in his

throat. "I'm in some kind of tropic paradise, right? Palm trees and coconuts and hot babes in bikinis and all that jazz. To be honest I didn't look hard at my boarding pass. My manager orchestrated this whole thing. Sweet of him, I know. Anyway, can you point me to the nearest bar? I think I need a daiquiri stat." He shoulders his bag as the attendant chews at her lip, eyes cast down at her polished Mary Janes.

"Mr. Tozier, you're in upstate New York. Specifically, Wilmington but the locals like to call it the North Pole. Maybe you've heard of it before? The Travel Channel ranked it the number one Christmas destination in America." She offers him a timid smile, red painted lips stretched over perfectly white teeth, totally sincere as if she hadn't just pulled the rug out from underneath him.

And there's the punchline, aimed right at his gut.

"Bullshit." The flight attendant flinches and Richie holds his hands up in front of him in apology. "Sorry, sorry, it's just... you're fucking with me right now, right? Playing a joke on the comedian. Ha! You got me, great, I'll put this in my next set. Now seriously, where's the closest bar? I'm thinking maybe I need to upgrade that daiquiri to something a little less fruity and a hell of a lot stronger." He tries to shoulder past her but she blocks his way with a soft but solid grip on his shoulders. She turns his body so that he faces one of the small windows that lines the plane, and Richie drops his bag and scrambles over the seats to get a better look.

Fuck.

Though it's dark outside, the orange and red lights of the runway reflect over the unmarred surface of a thick blanket of snow and even over the deep rumble of the engine, he can just barely make out the howling of the wind as it blows crystals of ice across the tarmac. His dreams of soaking in rum for a solid two weeks under the sun have been dashed, replaced with the sinking feeling that Stan's managed to pull one of the greatest pranks of all time on him. The guy's got a good sense of humor. It's a shame it just cost him his job.

"No. This has to be some kind of mistake. I must have gotten on the wrong flight. Or maybe the pilot made a left instead of a right. All I

know is that I'm supposed to be in Hawaii or the Bahamas or Maui right now. Hell, I'd take a damn pool noodle in the middle of the Bermuda Triangle over this."

"Mr Tozier. I can assure you, there's been no mistake. I checked your boarding pass myself, and if you don't remove yourself from this plane, I'm afraid I'm going to have to call security."

An hour later, Richie finds himself shivering outside of the tiny airport in nothing more than a pair of ill-fitting cargo shorts and a collared shirt in a garishly bright floral print that does nothing to shield the biting edge of the wind. He looks down at his bicep where a ring of bruises have started to form from the security guard dragging him out of the plane with the promise of having him arrested if he didn't leave. He had begged to stay on the plane, to catch the next flight back to LA. He had money. He could pay them whatever they wanted so long as they gave him more booze and took him somewhere warmer.

Definitely not one of his finer moments, but the thought of creating another PR nightmare for Stan to cleanup as a means for revenge far outweighs any embarrassment he feels on behalf of his actions.

Tomorrow, he tells himself as he runs his hands up and down his arms, chafing the skin to try to create some heat before he dies of hypothermia. Tomorrow he's going to march down to the airport, snag the first plane back home and fire Stan on the spot. Tonight, however, his first course of action is to try to find a way to stay warm.

"Excuse me! Are you Richie Tozier? I'm sorry I'm late, man. I had to wait for the plows to come through before I could get here." A voice from behind startles him out of his rage-fueled daydream of telling Stan to find someone else to micromanage and Richie turns to see a man leaning out of a yellow taxi. "I told Stan I'd be here at six, but mother nature had other plans. C'mon, hop in. I'll take you to the cabin Stan booked for you. I've got the heat blasting in here and uh, no offense, but you look like you're two seconds away from turning into an icicle."

"Right. So Stan had the decency to call me a cab. How very fucking

generous of him. Remind me to get him a Manager of the Year award or something.” Richie hurries to toss his bags into the backseat before folding himself into the old car. He presses his fingers to the vents where heat steadily pumps out. The air is so warm against his frozen fingers that it stings like fire against his skin. He’s never been so thankful to be in a taxi in his entire life and doubts he ever will again.

“Let me guess, he didn’t tell you where he was sending you, did he? Yeah, he mentioned you might be pissed, but hey, there are worse places to be.” Mike offers him a genuine smile that falters at Richie’s blank expression. He doesn’t mean to be a dick, really he doesn’t, it’s just that, well, sometimes he can be a dick.

As they drive out of the airport at a snail’s pace to avoid the patches of black ice on the asphalt, the driver talks to Richie, tells him his name is Mike and that he’s lived here for years, moved out here shortly after high school and never looked back.

“There’s something special about it,” he explains and his voice is rich like coffee. “Magical, even. You won’t find another place like this in the world. Sounds crazy, right? But you know that feeling you used to get on Christmas Eve when you were a kid? Anticipation and excitement and joy all wrapped up like a present under the tree. You felt alive like a hot wire. Well, that’s what this place is like all year long. Who wouldn’t want that?”

Richie decides as they pull into town that Mike is bonafide, one hundred percent clinically insane. It looks like a Christmas Tree Store vomited all over a village Walt Disney himself designed. The sleeping town is lined with dazzling lights in hues of gold that twinkle against the snowy backdrop. Intricate scaffolding lines the closed shops like icing on a gingerbread house and each door is adorned with a fresh evergreen wreath. Snowmen line the streets built on top of snow banks caused by plows, surveying the streets with smiles made of coal and thick scarves draped around their necks. It’s picture perfect. The spitting image of a postcard sold in a novelty shop.

Richie fucking hates it.

“Uh, me. I definitely don’t want this. Nope. This looks like my worst nightmare, like one of those B rated horror films from the 80s where

Santa turns out to be a demonic serial killer with zombie reindeer or some shit like that.” He shakes his head and his glasses slip down his nose. “I’m sure it’s great or whatever, and I’m glad you like it but I can’t wait to get the fuck outta here in the morning.”

Mike nods his head and turns right, away from the center of town and down a winding street lined with houses that must have spent thousands on their light displays. If Richie has to see one more inflatable Frozen character, he thinks he’s going to be sick.

“All I’m saying,” Mike starts slowly, “is maybe you should stick around for a day or two before you write this place off as some kind of tourist trap”

The rest of the ride is blessedly silent, and by the time Mike pulls up to a quaint cottage at the edge of town, Richie’s seen enough to know he would rather die than spend a full day here. Mike helps him get his bags out of the back, even offers to carry them to his door, but Richie waves him off and shoves a wad of bills into his hand with a promise to give him a call first thing in the morning.

And then he’s alone.

The inside of the cottage is exactly what he expected it to be. A flip of a light switch reveals a fully decorated and most definitely outdated cabin. Wood paneled walls and soft carpeted floors create a canvas to highlight the kitschy decorations that cover every inch of the cramped space. He throws his luggage onto the couch, a plaid relic of the 70s complete with a crocheted throw blanket. A real Christmas tree looms in the corner, permeating the air with the thick scent of pine sap so strong it makes his nose burn. He sneezes loudly and it echoes. Stockings hang from the fireplace, empty and waiting to be full of wrapped presents and garland drapes across the ice covered windows. It’s horrible and tacky and not for the first time that night, he curses Stan under his breath.

This vacation was supposed to be a getaway from his life, a chance to reset, and all its done is remind him of the loneliness that follows him wherever he goes. He hasn’t celebrated Christmas in years. Between the touring and the drinking, the lifestyle he’s led over the years has separated him from traditions he used to hold dear to his heart. But

what does it matter? He's famous. He's got the money and the cars, the swanky apartment and the ability to go wherever he wants, whenever he wants. Nevermind the fact that he's nearly forty and has never been in a stable relationship. Nevermind the fact that he's swiftly becoming a washed up celebrity, fit only for tabloid news and not the big stage. What's a Hallmark, commercialized holiday to a man who has it all?

Richie scrubs a hand over his tired face and makes his way to the kitchen. A quick search reveals the cabinets to be empty save for a single bottle of spiked eggnog in the liquor cabinet.

"Well, Stan, looks like you got one thing right," he mumbles to no one and opens the bottle, tipping it back and grimacing at its syrupy taste of nutmeg and cheer. It burns all the same which means it'll get the job done at least.

Notes for the Chapter:

Eddie makes his first appearance in the next chapter and from there on out, it's going to get real gay, folks. I'm talking Really Gay. Christmas Gay.

Do you guys celebrate Christmas? If so, what are some of your favorite traditions? And if not, what do you do with your family/by yourself during the holiday season? Let me know in the comments!

3. Chapter 3

Richie wakes late the next morning to bright sunshine pouring in from the living room windows and the overwhelming urge to paint the shag carpeting with the contents of his stomach. Eggnog, as it turns out, comes with a mean hangover. He groans and sits up from where he had passed out on the couch sometime after three in the morning. His neck aches, the muscles between his back and shoulders tense and knotted. Every inch of him hurts, from the screaming migraine threatening to black out his vision down to his bare feet that are freezing in the chill morning air.

“Jesus Christ, I’m too old for this,” he grumbles, sandpaper tongue scratching his dry throat and yet it hasn’t stopped him from waking up like this every single morning for longer than he’d care to admit, longer than he can remember.

It’s not that he has a drinking problem. No, not at all. He can go a day without drinking just fine, it’s the nights that are the problem. Dark and quiet, long and lonely, they make the thoughts in his head echo, a vicious stream of words that tell him exactly what he wants and all the reasons why he can’t have it. So he drinks to pass the time, drinks to quiet his anxieties, to tamp down the empty feeling in his chest that grows a little bit stronger every day.

He needs coffee and a lot of it if he’s planning on getting to the airport sometime before noon, and just as he’s about to pour water into the percolator that sits on the kitchen counter, he remembers with a pang of clarity that Stan couldn’t be bothered to stock this stupid fucking cabin with groceries.

As if this morning couldn’t get any worse.

And that’s how Richie finds himself trudging through the snow in nothing more than an old college sweatshirt and a pair of Nikes that are soaked through by the time he hits the edge of the driveway.

The walk into town is long and arduous and does nothing to raise his spirits or calm his nausea. The closer he gets to town, the worse his mood becomes. All around him families laugh and play. Proud

mothers take photos of their children with sticky sweet smiles covered in whipped cream as they drink hot chocolates to ward off the chill. Fathers carry their toddlers on their shoulders, pointing at carollers dressed as elves that sing catchy songs about Santa and his workshop. Street vendors line the sidewalks, ringing their bells and waving to tourists without a single ounce of sympathy for Richie's pounding headache.

Turns out that this place is worse than any nightmare he could possibly ever have. It's hell on earth.

He ducks into the first cafe he can find and shuffles to a table in the corner, far away from the window. Even now he can hear the slightly out of key version of Twelve Days of Christmas as it gets stuck in his head, repeating the line about six geese a laying over and over like a broken record. He puts his head in his hands and stares down at the etchings of the wooden table. At least it's quiet here. At least it smells like rich coffee beans and melted sugar. At least no one will bother him here--

"Good morning, sir. What can I get for you?"

A man from behind the counter walks to Richie's table with a notepad in hand. Though his voice is cheery, it sounds forced, like an actor who's said the same line one too many times. Richie doesn't even spare him a glance. He simply rummages through his pockets for his wallet and slides him a twenty dollar bill without looking up from the table.

"Whatever you want as long as it doesn't make a sound."

There's a moment of hesitation before the man walks away stiffly, shoulders squared back only to return moments later with a small tray in hand. He places it roughly down, the plates clattering sharply right under Richie's nose.

Richie startles and stares at a tall mug of coffee and a chocolate croissant that looks like it was made by God himself. He almost misses it, too busy staring at the drizzle of chocolate on top of the buttery pastry to notice the two Advil sitting on the plate. Slowly, Richie looks up to see a man with wide brown eyes and a jawline cut

from marble frown down at him.

“Let me guess,” the man says breezily. “You’re hungover which means you forgot what manners are. Fortunately for you, I’m not a total asshole.”

“Uh...” Richie blinks dumbly, dry tongue wetting his lips as he tries to form a coherent thought. “Sorry. And, uh, thanks I guess?”

It does the trick because the man seems satisfied enough with his answer to leave Richie alone with his racing heart and a hunger in his stomach. He doesn’t pay Richie any mind as he busies himself back behind the counter, replenishing rows of freshly baked cookies and scones in the display case. It takes more effort than Richie would care to admit to tear his eyes away from him to focus on his breakfast, but once he takes a bite of the croissant, everything else ceases to exist.

The pastry melts on his tongue like butter, the perfect mix of sweet and savory to settle his stomach, and before he knows it, he’s swallowed half of the croissant in three bites, licking the chocolate from the pads of his fingertips like a child might lick the batter from a spoon. He washes it down with piping hot coffee that had to have been freshly ground. The robust flavor clears his head and he pops the two advil in his mouth for good measure. By the time he’s picking up the crumbs to place on his tongue, he feels like a human being again.

When his plate is clean, the man comes out from behind the counter like clockwork to clear the table but before he can take it, Richie stops him.

“Can I have another?” he asks and the man bristles.

“What?”

“I asked if I could have another. Look, I know they’re probably a thousand calories each but that?” Richie says, pointing down at his plate, “was the best shit I’ve eaten since. Well, forever. And like hell am I going to pass up the chance to have another. So... one chocolate croissant please and another cup of coffee too.” To seal the deal, he

reaches for another twenty and holds it out. "How's that for manners?"

The man snatches the twenty from him and tucks it into his apron with the beginnings of a smile playing at his thin lips. "Better," he admits. "Delivery was a little rough, though. Let's see if you can do better by the time I get back."

Shit, Richie thinks. He's cute *and* he's witty.

Just as before, a plate is presented to him with a warm croissant covered in chocolate, this time even more than the last one and Richie barely waits for the plate to hit the table before he's picking it up and taking a hefty bite.

"Fuck. How do you do it? How do you make something taste so fucking good? Pardon my français." The horrible French accent that comes out of his mouth is enough to make the man snort and Richie thinks it's the best thing he's ever heard. Forget the sound of a theater full of applause. All he wants is to hear this guy laugh.

"Are you trying to flatter me to make up for being an asshole earlier?" he smiles and it sparks something in his eyes, mischievous and playful.

"Maybe. Will that work? Because I can wax poetic about this here delicatessen for at least the next three hours. Or I suppose I could leave you a generous tip. Whichever you prefer." Now it's Richie's turn to smile over the lip of his newly filled mug. "Are you the owner of this fine establishment?"

"The one and only. I'm Eddie. Eddie Kaspbrak, and maybe I should be the one apologizing to you," he says sheepishly. "I'm still getting used to this whole tourist trap thing. This is only my third winter up here."

"No, I was a dick. A major asshole. I'm surprised you didn't spit in my coffee before you gave it to me. You didn't, right?" Richie holds out his hand now that he's warmed up from being inside and holds it out for Eddie to take. Eddie takes it easily, palm covered in flour and a little sticky from working in the back. "I'm Richie Tozier. You might know me as--"

“Trashmouth Tozier,” Eddie finishes for him, eyes gone impossibly wide. “I thought you looked familiar. I saw your show in the city a few years back.”

“Yeah? And what did you think?”

“I, uh,” Eddie pulls back his hand and scratches the back of his neck. “I thought it fucking sucked, man.”

And just like that, Richie’s fucked.

The rest of the morning is filled with easy banter, harmless insults being tossed between each other as if they were old friends. Whenever Richie says something crass, Eddie always hits him with something that much worse, and Richie finds himself laughing so hard his stomach hurts. The second croissant is eaten and two more cups of coffee are had before he glances out of the window to see heavy snowflakes falling from the sky so thickly that the footprints made from the morning’s crowd are covered. There goes his shot at getting home today. No pilot in his right mind would fly in these conditions.

Richie can’t say he’s upset about it.

“You know, if you’re planning on staying here, you’re going to need a jacket. A real jacket, something waterproof maybe” Eddie plucks at Richie’s damp sweatshirt with a frown. “There’s a place a couple of blocks from here that sells sweaters and coats for people who forgot theirs. I can show you when I get off work. If you want.” Eddie’s feet shuffle where he stands, scuffing the tiled floor, and Richie knows his answer before he even opens his mouth.

“What time do you close, chef?”

Richie spends the afternoon camped out at the table in the corner. He tells Eddie he’ll wait here for the afternoon, try to get some work done since Eddie was so displeased with his previous show but when he pulls out his phone to open the document of test jokes, his eyes keep getting distracted by Eddie as he works.

There’s something tranquil about the way Eddie moves, sure and

confident as he mixes together batter and kneads dough. The muscles in his shoulders bunch and release, biceps straining as he rolls out different kinds of cookie dough that he cuts into various shapes, each adorned with a selection of homemade jams and chocolate sauces. The only times he falters are when a customer walks in and even then, Eddie smiles for them, offers free samples and gives special treats to the children who are well-behaved. And between all of that, he manages to sneak over to let Richie try what he's working on until his stomach is full of sugar and aching.

Eddie, it seems, is gentle and kind, yet quick to temper and bristle. He's talented with his hands, yet stilted with his words, but above all of that, it seems to Richie that he's honest with everyone he meets and even to himself.

He's everything Richie wants to be and so much more.

The evening approaches swiftly and Eddie gathers his things and counts down his till. Once the money is put in the safe and the dough for tomorrow's breads are proofing in the back, he grabs his keys and they head out into the quiet night, footsteps crunching on the freshly fallen snow.

"So, I've been meaning to ask all day, why are you here?" Eddie asks as he adjusts his scarf to cover the tip of his chin.

"What? A man can't take a vacation to the North Pole for no reason? Maybe I'm here for the elves."

"I didn't say that!" Eddie laughs. "Just... you don't seem the type. Most people come with their families but you're here alone."

Richie blows out a stream of air through his nose and it comes out a billow of steam in the frigid air. He shivers and shoves his hands into his pockets. He could see himself enjoying a place like this if he had a family of his own.

"It was a gift. A shitty gift from my manager. You'd like him. He's a no nonsense guy, like you." Richie kicks at the snow and winces as some gets into his socks, freezing his already cold socks. "What about you? You bring your family up here when you opened up shop?"

Eddie shakes his head. "Just me. I'm only here for the holiday season anyway. Most people leave in March and come back in October. Six months of Christmas is too fucking much. No way could I do it all year. I have a place back in Manhattan, upper East Side."

"Upper East Side?" Richie whistles low. "Damn, I must be in the wrong business. Who knew baking paid so well. Maybe I'll try my hand at making some of those cookies you gave me earlier. What were they called again? With the raspberry jelly?"

"Linzer tarts," Eddie smiles. "And you'd ruin them. Come on, hurry up, before you freeze to death."

They walk the rest of the way in amicable silence until Eddie ushers him into a small shop that smells strongly of wool and peppermint.

"You've got to be fucking kidding me," Richie stops dead in his tracks as he takes in the merchandise hanging on the racks and adorning the mannequins. Christmas sweaters, ugly, horrible, tacky Christmas sweaters with animal characters and bells and LED lights that flash.

"What?" Eddie laughs so hard his face turns red. "Did you think I was taking you to a fucking Macy's? You're in a Christmas themed town, Richie, what did you expect?" Eddie pulls a sweater from the rack closest to him and holds it up gleefully. "This has your name written all over it."

The sweater is a dark green with a cat facing away, its tail held straight up in the air with a Christmas tree bauble dangling strategically from the base. It's horrendous in a way that makes him feel sick which is to say, it's the best thing he's ever seen. "You're right. I think the cat anus will really bring out the color in my eyes, don't you?" he grins.

They spend the following hour piling sweater after sweater into their arms, laughing at the hilarity of the atrocious designs. Richie finds the most monstrous sweater of them all and slips it over Eddie's head when he's not paying attention, and even though he frowns so hard his dimples are pronounced, Eddie lets Richie snap a photo after he promises not to include it in any upcoming jokes. In the end, they manage to find a handful of tops that are relatively tame in

comparison and a thick, wool peacoat to get Richie through the next two weeks, and as they exit the shop with a shopping bag full of memories, he realizes that this is the most fun he's had in years and he owes all of it to Eddie.

"So," Richie clears his throat. He knows he shouldn't be doing this. He should go back to the cabin and pack up his things. Hell, he should march back into that shop and return the items, tell Eddie this was a mistake. He should go back home to LA instead of wasting his time here. Instead, he says: "Seems like you know your way around the area and since I'm new to town and clearly am not used to the snow, I think maybe you should show me around. You free tomorrow after work?"

The question seems to catch Eddie off guard, and though it's hard to tell under the dim light coming from the street lamps, it seems like his cheeks are tinged a rosy pink. "Alright, deal, but you owe me dinner for letting you take my picture. And a drink."

Richie laughs. "You drive a tough bargain, Eduardo, but I think I can manage that. I'll see you tomorrow at five then?"

Eddie smiles and ducks his head. "Yeah, same as tonight. And Richie? Please don't wear the cat anus to dinner tomorrow."

When they part ways, Richie walks home feeling warmer than he has since he stepped off the plane the day before and he thinks maybe it has more to do with the way Eddie had smiled at him before he left than it does with the new coat he has on over his clothes.

Notes for the Chapter:

three updates in one day? it's more likely than you'd think

Author's Note:

It's a cheesy Hallmark Christmas Reddie AU. What more could you want?

This chapter is more of a prologue. The following ones will be longer, promise.

Tell me what you think in the comments!